



## CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE COST ESTIMATE

October 6, 2004

### **H.R. 5135** **Northern Mariana Islands Delegate Act**

*As ordered reported by the House Committee on Resources on September 29, 2004*

H.R. 5135 would provide Congressional representation for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI) by creating a nonvoting delegate in the House of Representatives beginning in January 2006. As a nonvoting Member, the delegate would have some of the same powers of a full-fledged Member including the ability to introduce bills, offer amendments and vote in House committees, but would not be able to vote on the floor of the House. In addition, the delegate would receive the same compensation, allowances, and benefits as a Member. Under current law, the Northern Mariana Islands elects a Resident Representative who represents the CNMI government in the United States, but has no official status in the Congress.

Enacting H.R. 5135 would increase direct spending for the payment of the salary of the new nonvoting delegate. CBO estimates that the increase in direct spending would be less than \$200,000 per year.

Based on the current administrative and expense allowances available for Members and other typical office costs, CBO estimates that the addition of a new nonvoting delegate would cost approximately \$1.2 million annually beginning in fiscal year 2006, subject to the availability of appropriated funds.

The bill contains no intergovernmental or private-sector mandates as defined in the Unfunded Mandates Reform Act (UMRA) and would impose no costs on state, local, or tribal governments.

The bill does not require CNMI to select a delegate, but if it chooses to do so, it would require the government of CNMI to hold biennial elections in even years. (All CNMI elections now take place in odd years.) Based on information provided by CNMI officials, we estimate that the cost of each election would be about \$25,000. CNMI would save substantially more than that, however, because it would no longer pay for a Resident Representative in Washington, once a delegate was elected and in place. All the expenses of the delegate's office would be paid by the federal government.

The CBO staff contacts for this estimate are Matthew Pickford (for the federal costs), and Marjorie Miller (for the state and local impact). This estimate was approved by Peter H. Fontaine, Deputy Assistant Director for Budget Analysis.